



News Release

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Cleanup works: Shellfish harvest area near Skokomish River reopens

Cooperative effort reduces contamination threat from human waste to oyster, clam beds

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Department of Health reopened the Annas Bay shellfish harvest area in Mason County Wednesday afternoon. The agency had closed the area Aug. 18 because of the potential for human waste left by sport fishers to contaminate oysters and clams.

Annas Bay, on Hood Canal near Union, lies immediately downstream of the salmon fishery taking place on the Skokomish River. Because of tides, harvests won't begin until at least today.

Wednesday, Department of Health shellfish staff members spent several hours examining the area. In the past week, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff, Hunter Farms and sport fishers have thoroughly removed and buried human waste, and have picked up trash along the river.

WDFW has placed a sufficient number of portable toilets for sport fishers. It is making sure the portable toilets are maintained, it has placed trash receptacles in obvious locations, and it has encouraged fishers to use the portable toilets and to maintain the cleanliness of the area.

"It is obviously working, because there is virtually no evidence of human waste anywhere near the river," said Bob Woolrich, Growing Area Section manager for the Department of Health's Office of Shellfish and Water Protection. "WDFW, Hunter Farms and the sport fishers deserve credit for cleaning the area and making Annas Bay safe once again for the harvest of oysters and clams downstream."

"WDFW is extremely proud and appreciative of the outstanding cleanup effort that our staff, Hunter Farms and sport anglers took on voluntarily," said Phil Anderson, WDFW interim director. "Their accomplishments, combined with the good behavior on the part of the anglers,

have resulted in this positive outcome. We'll continue to work closely with the Department of Health to monitor the fishery and rely on anglers to do their part to keep the area safe and clean."

Anderson and WDFW staff members toured the river with Department of Health staff members to assess the situation first-hand during the week of Aug. 24.

In response, WDFW:

- Increased the number of portable toilets, together with Hunter Farms, (to 17) placed at key points of angler entry to fishing areas;
- Increased the number of solid waste receptacles, together with Hunter Farms, (to four) placed at convenient locations;
- Posted signs in the area to educate anglers about the need to use facilities and Dumpsters;
- Issued a news release about the sanitation concerns associated with the fishery, and emphasized that angler assistance is needed to keep the fishery safe, clean and orderly or that the fishery could be closed;
- Had enforcement officers and Fish Program staff contact anglers on the river to deliver the message directly;
- Cleaned up human feces and garbage on the shores and banks of the Skokomish River from Purdy Creek downstream to the culvert replacement project on state Highway 106.

The reopening will not include the 300-acre area now classified as "Prohibited" because an administrative process is required to reclassify that part of Annas Bay.

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